Mauritius Sugar Industry

Research Institute

First Annual Report

of the

Executive Board

1953

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Report of

Chairman, Executive Board

of the

Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute.

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The purpose of the Institute shall be to conduct research and experimentation in the various fields of sugar production, to disseminate the relevant knowledge obtained within the Industry and thereby strengthen the efficiency of sugar production in Mauritius.

(Extract from Rules & Regulations)

INTRODUCTION.

The desirability of transferring the Sugarcane Research Station from Government to the Sugar Industry was first raised in 1947 by the Mauritius Economic Commission. The question was discussed intermittently without tangible results until 1950 when the matter was revived by His Excellency the Governor.

After further discussion agreement was reached as to the principle of the transfer and in December, 1951, Messrs. E. S. O'Connor, Financial Secretary, W. Allan, Director of Agriculture, C. Noël, A. M. Osman and Guy Rouillard were appointed by His Excellency as a joint committee of Government and the Sugar Industry "to examine the implications and conditions of the proposed transfer of the Sugarcane Research Station to the Sugar Industry".

The Committee actively and thoroughly examined the complex problem of the proposed transfer and put in a unanimous report to His Excellency on the 18th March, 1952. Eventually the necessary legislation was enacted and Ordinance No. 9 of 1953 was passed by the Legislative Council on 29th June, 1953 giving legal existence to the "Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute".

The Ordinance only came into force however on 29th August, 1953 and it was not until October that the first Board was appointed.

The Board held its first sitting on Friday 2nd October, 1953 at the Chamber of Agriculture and held altogether twelve meetings up to the end of 1953, all meetings subsequent to the first being held at Réduit, except for one which was held at Mon Plaisir, Pamplemousses.

This, the first report on the activities of the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute, will therefore be of moderate interest as it only covers a period of three months during which all the activities of the Board had to be concentrated on organising or, one might say, creating, the Institute.

The Board whose members are, under the law, appointed annually for each calendar year has nevertheless thought it advisable that a report covering the first months of its activities be published. The technical annual report of the Director of the Institute which will in future accompany the Chairman's report will however only be published at the end of 1954, to cover the whole initial period of the Institute's activities.

The members appointed by the Governor in Council to serve on the Board were:

Mr. W. Allan, C.B.E., Director of Agriculture
The Hon. A. L. Nairac, C.B.E., nominated by the Chamber of Agriculture
Messrs. P. G. A. Anthony, P. P. Dalais, C. Noël — nominated by the Mauritius Sugar Producers' Association
Mr. L. A. Rouillard ... nominated by the Cane Growers' Association
Mr. D. Luckeenarain ... nominated by the Mauritius Planters' Association
Mr. Manilall Ramdin ... nominated by the Federation of Credit Cooperative Societies.

At its first meeting the Board appointed the Hon. André L. Nairac, C.B.E., as Chairman and decided to offer the post of Director of the Institute to Mr. P. O. Wiehe, M.Sc., A.R.C.S., F.L.S., formerly Plant Pathologist in Mauritius and subsequently in Nyasaland.

At the next meeting the Chairman was able to inform the Board that agreement had been reached with Mr. Wiehe and, pending the signature of a formal agreement, Mr. Wiehe immediately assumed his new duties as first Director of the Institute, being appointed to the post with effect from 1st October, 1953.

The main activities of the Board can be divided under the following heads:

A. Decisions as to the future structure of the Institute in relation to its aims, objects and financial possibilities. The appointment of personnel to implement these decisions.

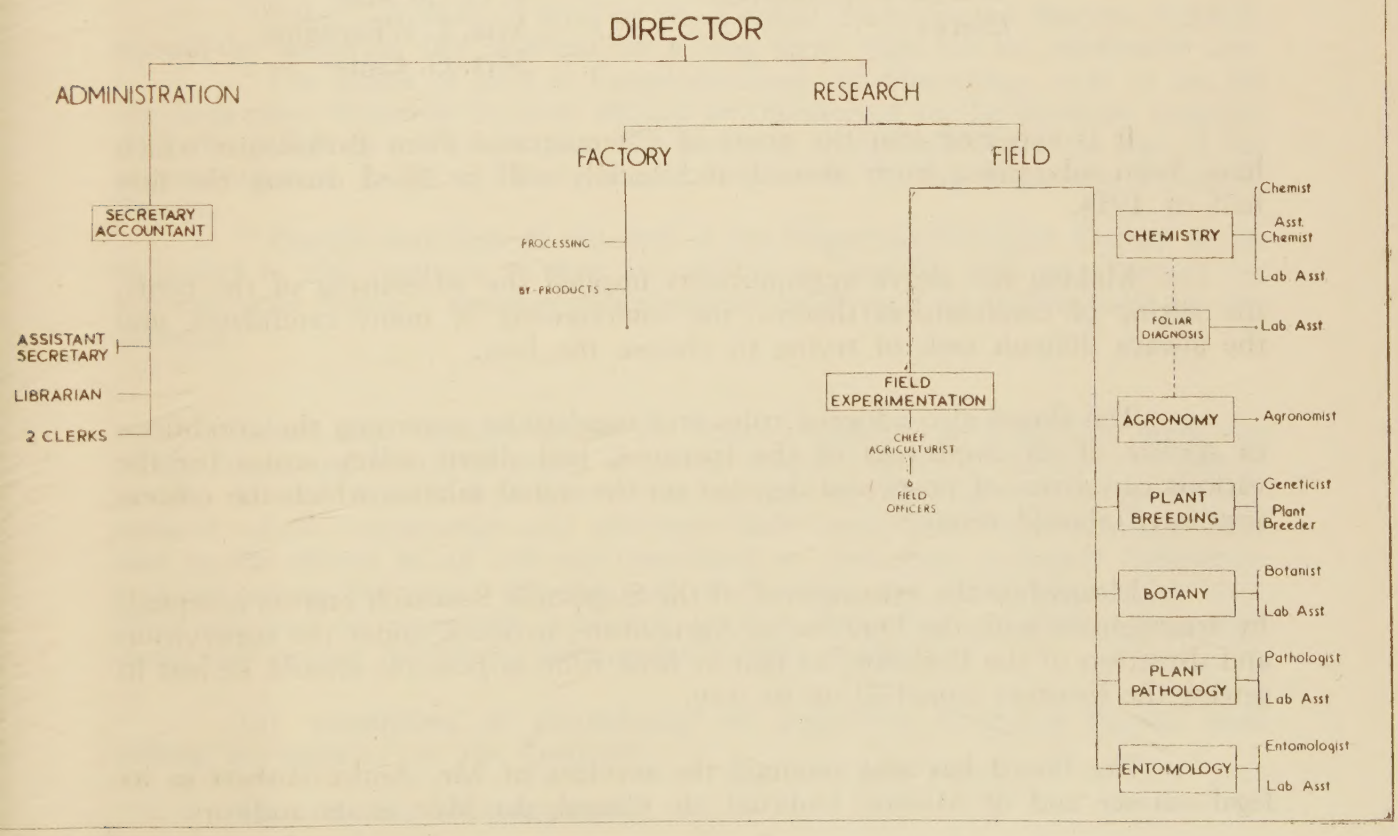
B. Negotiations with the Government to give practical effect to the recommendations of the Joint Committee regarding the conditions of the transfer of the Sugarcane Research Station to the Institute.

C. The organisation of the finances of the Institute and the preparation and approval of its budget as regards both capital and ordinary expenditure.

A. STRUCTURE AND APPOINTMENT OF PERSONNEL OF THE INSTITUTE.

One of the first and major questions to which the Board had to devote much time and attention was the structure of the Institute in relation to the aims to be attained and the financial resources at its disposal. On the recommendation of the Director, the Board finally decided on the following structure which is shown diagramatically below.

STRUCTURE OF THE INSTITUTE



The Board further decided that appointments to the posts of Geneticist, Entomologist and Librarian would be deferred until the financial structure of the Institute had been consolidated and adequate accommodation become available. Similarly specialist officers to work on problems connected with sugar manufacture and by-products could only be appointed later.

Concerning the other posts, the following officers, five of whom were taken from the Sugarcane Research Station, had been selected by the end of the year and were all to have assumed their duties at latest by the 15th of January, 1954:

Plant Breeder	...	A. de Sornay
Botanist	...	E. Rochecouste
Agronomist	...	P. Halais
Chief Agriculturist	...	G. Rouillard
Assistant Chemist	...	S. M. Feillafé
Field Officers	...	G. Mazery
		F. Mayer
		L. P. Noël
		M. Hardy
Laboratory Assistants	...	L. C. Figon
		P. Rouillard
Secretary-Accountant	...	P. G. du Mée
Clerks	...	Mrs. L. d'Espagnac
		Mrs. G. Caine

It is expected that the posts of Chemist and Plant Pathologist which have been advertised both abroad and locally will be filled during the first half of 1954.

Making the above appointments implied the advertising of the posts, the sifting of candidatures thereto, the interviewing of many candidates, and the always difficult task of trying to choose the best.

The Board also adopted rules and regulations governing the conditions of service of all employees of the Institute, laid down salary scales for the various categories of posts and decided on the initial salaries which the officers appointed should receive.

Meanwhile the existing staff of the Sugarcane Research Station accepted, by arrangement with the Director of Agriculture, to work under the supervision and direction of the Director, so that as little time as possible should be lost in getting the Institute launched on its way.

The Board has also retained the services of Mr. André Robert as its legal adviser and of Messrs. Dubruel, de Chazal, du Mée as its auditors.

B. TRANSFER OF THE SUGARCANE RESEARCH STATION BY GOVERNMENT TO THE INSTITUTE.

The recommendations of the Joint Committee were briefly the following :

"The present Government Bacteriological Laboratory should be sold to the Institute for the present value of Rs. 235,000. — as assessed by the Government Valuer — the purchase price being payable in equal yearly instalments, without interest, over a period of twenty years, commencing from the date when the building is transferred to the Institute. That consideration be given to the request of the Sugar Industry for the purchase of the house at present occupied by the Senior Pathologist, or, failing this, for the lease thereof for a period of five years.

"The equipment of the existing Sugarcane Research Station should be transferred to the Institute free of charge.

"The Institute should be allowed to make use, at a nominal rental, of the present Sugarcane Research Station building for a period not exceeding five years.

"The land at the Central Experimental Station, Réduit, now in use by the Sugarcane Research Station, should also be leased at a nominal rental, to the Institute for a period of five years or for such longer period as may be necessary for the completion of any experiment in progress at the time the Institute takes over.

"Fifteen arpents of land at the Central Experimental Station, Réduit, should be leased to the Institute on a long term basis for its permanent use.

"The leases of land at Pamplemousses and Hermitage, now in use by the Sugarcane Research Station, should be transferred to the Institute together with the buildings at Hermitage. The Institute should also have the use of the accommodation in Mon Plaisir House now used by the Sugarcane Research Station.

"Present members of the staff of the Sugarcane Research Station to be seconded to the Institute if they are willing to transfer and are accepted by the Executive Board — pension contributions being paid to Government by the Institute."

Much time was devoted by the Board in session, by individual members of the Board and by the Director in giving practical effect to these recommendations. I would like here to pay tribute not only to the Director of Agriculture, without whose cooperation and efficiency little could have been achieved, but also to the efforts of all officials concerned to overcome technical difficulties and cut across red tape. By the end of the year the following results have been achieved or practically achieved, wanting only for completion, in some cases, the signing of formal documents already drafted:

(*a*) conditions of secondment of Sugarcane Research Station staff willing to transfer to the Institute;

(*b*) transfer of equipment;

(*c*) lease of buildings at the Department of Agriculture, pending purchase of the Bacteriological Laboratory buildings.

The Board also reached agreement with the Sugar Industry Reserve Fund Committee concerning the Foliar Diagnosis Laboratory which forms now an integral part of the Institute. Mr. Pierre Halais, formerly in charge of the Laboratory, accepted appointment as Agronomist with the Institute.

On being appointed to the staff of the Institute, Mr. Guy Rouillard, who had initiated the "Centre Agronomique du Nord", put his field experiments at the disposal of the Institute.

C. FINANCES.

The Institute is financed by a cess of Rs. 2. per ton of exported sugar, but the Ordinance having come into effect on August 29th, 1953, after exports of sugar for 1953 had already started, the total revenue to be expected from this source during the first financial year of the Institute (ending 30th June 1954) amounts to Rs. 820,000. The Board however anticipates an additional revenue of approximately Rs. 80,000 arising out of voluntary contributions from millers and large planters on their sugars of the 1953—54 crop exported prior to the date on which the Ordinance was proclaimed. It is hoped further, that a certain sum will be paid over to the Board out of the Reserve Fund built up by the Agricultural College — now a Government financed institution — out of the monies paid thereto by the Sugar Industry.

It is expected that at the end of the present financial year the Institute, after incurring capital and non-recurrent expenditure estimated at Rs. 320,000, will have constituted the following reserves :

General Reserve Fund	...	Rs. 115,000
Pensions Fund	...	12,000
Leave & Missions Fund	...	50,000

As against this however must be set the facts that: (*a*) the expenses of the Institute will only cover some nine months and will be well below those of a normal year, (*b*) charges to the pension fund will be significantly higher in future years, (*c*) the Institute will have to incur in the near future additional capital expenditure to the extent of Rs. 600,000 or more, if it is to be put on the desired footing of efficiency.

It is therefore the opinion of the Board that while the financial prospects of the Institute are satisfactory, it is none the less essential to show the greatest care and caution as to expenditure, and that it will take a number of years to ensure the financial stability of the Institute.

The extract from the Rules and Regulations quoted at the start of this report represents all that the 1953 Board had time to do as regards the formulation of the Institute's Policy; the clear definition of the Institute's Research

Policy, the laying down of a definite programme of research, with the help of the Advisory Committee, envisaged by the Ordinance, are among the very first tasks that the 1954 Board will have to undertake: what the 1953 Board has done is merely to provide the bare essential requirements to enable the Institute to start on its first effective year of work in 1954.

I would in conclusion express my deep appreciation of the workmanlike manner and high spirit of responsibility with which my colleagues of the Board approached their difficult task and consign my thanks to our Secretary-Accountant, and those members of the staff who have started their duties, for the keen and competent manner in which they have discharged these duties. The excellent work of the Director, Mr. Wiehe, deserves special mention. The progress which the Board has been able to make during its three months tenure of office has been due very largely to his energy, tact and powers of organisation. The spirit is there, and under the inspiration of its Director, the Institute can look hopefully into the future.

20th February 1954.

A. L. NAIRAC,

Chairman.

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